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Ex-C.I.A. Aide Tells Jury of 'Self Deception' by U.S.

By M. A. FARBER

George W. Allen, a former deputy chief of Vietnamese affairs for the Central Intelligence Agency, testified yesterday that the production in late 1967 of a "misleading" intelligence estimate on enemy strength in South Vietnam was part of a broader "self deception" by the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson regarding progress in the war.

Mr. Allen, testifying for CBS in the trial of the libel suit brought by Gen. William C. Westmoreland, said the White House had tried to "head off mounting public opposition to the war" in the summer of 1967 through a "massive public-relations campaign to influence, exaggerate and misrepresent."

It was in this context, Mr. Allen said on cross-examination in Federal District Court in Manhattan, that he once described a dispute over the enemy strength estimate as "making a mountain out a molehill."

"I was referring to the fact that the production of this dishonest estimate was only a small part of that bigger issue, that bigger exercise by the Administration, which in fact, caused its loss of credibility," Mr. Allen told the jury. And that effort, he said, "produced an area of self-deception to the extent that neither the Congress, nor members of the Administration, nor the population was prepared for the psychological impact mounted by the Communist forces on an unprecedented scale" during the Tet offensive in January 1968.

Played 'the Good Bureaucrat'

Mr. Allen, who retired from the C.I.A. in 1979 but still works under contract for the agency, portrayed himself as someone who had compromised his own integrity in 1967 and played "the good bureaucrat" until this case forced him to "cross the Rubicon" and confront his own failings and those of the Government.

But David Dorsen, a lawyer for General Westmoreland, suggested that the 58-year-old witness had tailored his testimony to help Samuel A. Adams, a former C.I.A. colleague who is one of the defendants at the trial before Judge Pierre N. Leval.

— Q. Isn't it a fact, Mr. Allen, that you are here testifying in order to help your old protégé, Sam Adams?

A. That is not the case at all, Mr. Dorsen. I did not come to this courtroom simply to defend or come to the aid of a beleaguered former colleague of mine.

Mr. Allen, who completed his testimony yesterday as the second witness for CBS, said he wanted to assist the jury and the public in understanding "the responsibility that many officers in the intelligence community have, to insuring that honest estimates are presented to the policymakers."

Mr. Dorsen then brought out that, at the start of the second day of a pre-trial deposition in August 1983, Mr. Allen had asked to have the oath "to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" repeated for him. It was "the whole truth" part that he wanted "verified," Mr. Allen said then.

Yesterday, Mr. Allen explained that he told the truth on the first day of the deposition but hadn't listened to the oath when it was read. He said he had "lain awake" all the previous night "reviewing the seriousness of the situation and the events of the last 15 years," during which time, he said, he had "rationalized and been evasive" regarding the 1967 estimate on enemy strength in Vietnam.

Having the oath "reaffirmed" on the second day of the deposition, he said, "was a symbolic gesture by me that the time had come to stop dissembling, no matter what the personal embarrassment to me."

General Westmoreland's suit stems from a 1982 CBS documentary — "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception" — which charged that the general's command had engaged in a "conspiracy" to minimize North Vietnamese and Vietcong capabilities. As part of this "conscious effort," the broadcast said, the general removed the hamlet-based self-defense forces from the official listing of enemy strength known as the order of battle and refused to allow a current count for them in a 25-page special estimate for President Johnson in November 1967.

Military 'Insignificance'

General Westmoreland contends that the documentary defamed him by saying he had lied to the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the true size and nature of the enemy. He testified that he deleted the self-defense forces — newly estimated in 1967 at 120,000, an increase of 50,000 — because he had come to believe that they were insignificant militarily and that reference to the higher number would mislead Washington and the press.

In addition to Mr. Adams, who served as a paid consultant for the documentary, the individual defendants in the case are George Crile, the producer of the broadcast, and Mike Wallace, its narrator.

Under questioning yesterday by Mr. Dorsen, Mr. Allen acknowledged telling Mr. Crile in early 1981, when the producer's investigation was getting under way, that he would not appear on the documentary if it attacked the C.I.A. Mr. Crile, Mr. Allen said, assured him that that was not his intention.

"Did Mr. Crile tell you that 'I'm a journalist and I can't make any promises till I hear all the evidence?'"

"Not as you worded it," Mr. Allen said. "But he told me that he had gathered considerable evidence against the military and was not at that time targeting the C.I.A."

Like Mr. Allen, Mr. Adams favored the inclusion of the self-defense forces in the order of battle and argued, at a series of conferences with representatives of General Westmoreland in 1967, that the total strength of the enemy should be estimated at about 500,000. The military successfully advocated a total of about 300,000 — which the documentary described as an "arbitrary ceiling."

Yesterday, as he had on Wednesday, Mr. Allen accused his superiors at the C.I.A. of "caving in" to the military.

Mr. Allen said the military had let the C.I.A. and other intelligence agencies know of the higher estimate for the self-defense forces. But the important thing, he said, was that the military would not permit that number to be included in the estimate for the President.

Mr. Allen conceded that he had not discussed the order of battle with General Westmoreland in 1967 and that, unlike Mr. Adams, he had not complained to a review board about the estimate for the President before it was signed and sent to the White House.

He also acknowledged writing a draft statement for an inquiry into the dispute in 1975 by the House Select Committee on Intelligence in which he said "I am not aware of any instance in which the C.I.A., as Mr. Adams suggests, deliberately modified its assessments on Vietnam to accommodate the policy interests of any administration." And he admitted testifying before the committee that he was "able to accept the final agreed-upon figures as reflected in the estimate" in November 1967.

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A But Mr. Allen said that, under "instructions" by William Colby, then the Director of Central Intelligence, he had been "less than candid" with the committee.

"Make them dig," Mr. Allen said he was told by Mr. Colby and by Mitchell Rogovin, the C.I.A.'s general counsel.

The remark brought smiles to the faces of both Mr. Dorsen and David Boies, the lawyer for CBS.

"Had you on other occasions spoken to lawyers who gave you similar comments?" Mr. Dorsen asked.

Not like "make them dig," said Mr. Allen.

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